

May 29, 2018

HCPSS Announces New Plan for Enhancing Student Mental Health Supports

Ellicott City, Maryland—Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) has launched a new effort to enhance mental health services and supports for students in crisis, in collaboration with community and government agencies. This approach will leverage mental health providers within our county to amplify the supports we are able to provide. In developing these initiatives, HCPSS staff reviewed national best practices as well as efforts in neighboring jurisdictions.

“This has been a very difficult year, and many students and families are reaching out for help with mental health needs, including stress and anxiety associated with performance in school,” said Interim Superintendent Michael J. Martirano. “Through this innovative approach to leverage existing community resources in conjunction with HCPSS staff, HCPSS can become a leader in coordinating services for our students.”

The new plan includes several components:

- **Superintendent’s Community Sub-Cabinet on Mental Health:** This team of leaders representing community organizations, government agencies and school system divisions will convene quarterly to establish structures, align resources and monitor progress toward established goals.
- **Mental Health Community Advisory:** The long-standing community Mental Health Taskforce will be revitalized and restructured as a community advisory, which will serve as an engine for collaboration and development of community priorities for youth mental health, including comprehensive mental health supports.
- **New Social Worker Model:** Three licensed mental health professionals on HCPSS staff will each work with an area superintendent to directly support the varied needs of students and families in their assigned school communities, in collaboration with the instructional facilitator for school social work, the coordinator of alternative education and local mental health service providers.
- **Providers Network:** School system staff will refer families needing services to this group of community mental health providers, which work directly with clients and handle billing independently. This offers a budget-neutral solution for expanding mental health services.
- **Development of a four-year Strategic Plan:** Building on these initiatives and the addition of social workers for this upcoming school year, the plan will guide budget and policy decisions for future staffing and funding needs.

In addition, HCPSS has issued a Request for Proposals to identify mental health providers to partner with schools and families, and is exploring grant opportunities in collaboration with the Howard County Health Department and Horizon Foundation to further enhance the impact of collective mental health services.